

**BRISTOL WARREN REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE
WORKSHOP
MONDAY, MARCH 10, 2008**

The monthly workshop of the Bristol Warren Regional School Committee was held in the library of Kickemuit Middle School, 525 Child Street, Warren, RI, on Monday, March 10, 2008. The Chairperson, William A. Estrella, Jr, called the meeting to order at approximately 7:24 PM.

Present: William A. Estrella, Jr., Marjorie J. McBride, Paul Silva, Paul E. Brule, Diana B. Campbell, David L. Dugan, Karen A. Lynch and John P. Saviano; and Edward P. Mara, Superintendent; Melinda L. Thies, Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Curriculum, Assessment and Instruction; and Mary Cerullo, Executive Director of Literacy K-12, Elementary Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment

Absent: William M. O'Dell

OPENING BUSINESS

All present were invited to join in the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag.

PRESENTATION ON NECAP REPORTING

Math

Melinda Thies presented the NECAP Math scores for grades three through eight. High School math scores have been a point of controversy in most districts in the state as well as in New Hampshire and Vermont, who are the only other states that use NECAP. Although the high school performance was low, we were in the top 14 of 60.

Mr. Saviano asked if the questions were too difficult and how do we compare with states other than New England. Mrs. Thies explained that Mrs. Molicone, Department Head at Mt. Hope, sat on the standards setting committee, which intentionally held the bar very high. NECAP is a great assessment tool that aligns our curriculum, assessments and standards. She said we need to look at the high school to assure the curriculum aligns with the standards, we must look at how we are instructing that curriculum and if teachers are totally focused on those standards. We must look to mastering the skills and concepts, as well as the connection and relevance to the real world.

Mrs. McBride commented that she really dislikes Chicago Math. Mrs. Thies believes students should be taught multiplication tables, addition and subtraction, but they must also develop thinking skills—have “a foot in both worlds.” High standards must be maintained to help make us globally competitive. Unlike literacy, math has had no mandates and no funding. Mrs. Campbell is in total agreement, high school math curriculum has been unchanged for 50

years and maintaining high standards is the best way to address that; there is no problem with giving math homework every night. Mrs. Lynch commented that if we lower the bar to raise the test scores, we do a disservice to the students. Dr. Mara said there is a significant design flaw in this assessment; students are not provided a “warm-up”; he and his colleagues believe students tend to give up early on. Mrs. McBride further explained her issues with Chicago math: 1) no times tables taught; 2) based on a spiraling design from grades K to 6—not good for students entering the District in the mid-line grades; 3) parents are begging for more workshops on how to do third grade math. Math skills needed for routine shopping are non-existent, when kids go off to college no one is nice and we need to prepare our students for that; we need more ramp-up programs; not as many kids as we think make it through the K-6 grade spiral.

Dr. Mara feels the 7th and 8th grade math program does not properly prepare our students for 9th and 10th grade. Mrs. Thies reported another math program “Impact Math” is currently being piloted that provides a smoother transition into high school.

Mr. Estrella commented that it is an arduous process to make sure issues are addressed; our kids need us more now than ever before and they must jam so much more knowledge into their brains. People need to understand that school is like a work day—school is their job. We must hold our children to higher standards and we must maintain rigor; this is something that Mary Parks, a former Warren High School

teacher now deceased, did very well. Our efforts must be community-wide. Mrs. Thies said we have improved and although 67% proficiency is way above the state level, it is not good enough for our children, we have to marshal fiscal resources.

Mr. Dugan reiterated Mr. Saviano's concerns on how our standards compare to those of other states. Mrs. Thies explained that each state does things differently, the systems is very disparate. NECAP is a very rigorous assessment attached to high standards; with the exception of Virginia, Maryland and some others, the standards in other states are not as rigorous. Mr. Dugan said a study showed that at grade 3, math is a favorite subject but in high school, it is the least favorite; he is undecided about Chicago Math. Mrs. Thies and Dr. Mara said we must look at how we deliver the content and engage the students. Virginia and the countries having the most success in math have a longer school day and a longer school year; Japan has a national curriculum.

Mr. Estrella asked that math curriculum be an agenda item for the May workshop so this discussion can continue. Mrs. McBride expressed respect and gratitude for the work Mrs. Thies and Mrs. Cerullo are doing to get this district to the top. Mr. Estrella said it is important to have a K to 5 learning experience; some of our students have been to five different schools—this is part of the reason behind regionalization and the building projects.

Mr. Saviano elaborated on his question about the level of standards; he is concerned that when it comes to college applications all students are not on equal footing and the yard stick may not be the same. He feels we cannot drop the ball in the middle grades, he has seen huge increases but we are going to do a better job for our kids and we must be sure our students are treated on the same basis as students in other states.

Mrs. Campbell asked if all our math teachers are highly qualified. Mrs. Thies explained elementary teachers are highly qualified by virtue of their elementary certification; they do not have a focus area.

Reading & Writing

Mrs. Cerullo presented the District's NECAP scores for reading and writing and explained that the expectations for fifth grade students have changed dramatically over the past years. Since her coming to the District five years ago, the time devoted to reading and writing has increased to 180 minutes per day and programs have been implemented that have greatly benefited the students; Bristol Warren has had the most improved scores—79% proficiency. Three years ago the bar was raised; this was a difficult change for the teachers and students but it has proven very beneficial.

Mr. Estrella and Mrs. Cerullo stressed the importance of parents reading to their children, especially before the age of five and into

middle and high school; we all must continue to encourage them to read. Mr. Dugan said Mrs. Cerullo emphasized this at the Title I Open House. Mrs. McBride said it is incredible how well the students have done in reading and asked for more information on writing in May; she also said that ProJo is publishing a chapter of Ramona each week. Mrs. Lynch mentioned that it is important for children to learn from example; there is nothing more rewarding than not being able to shut a book. Mrs. Campbell also felt the administrators are doing a wonderful job and she asked about unassigned reading. Mrs. Cerullo said children have independent reading on a daily basis. Mr. Saviano is very pleased with the job that has been done.

Mrs. Cerullo is passionate about improving the dropout rate at the high school. Dr. Mara said everything in this District is data-driven—the number of IEPs at the K to grade 3 level is wonderfully low; he attributes this to all-day K, the increase in the entrance age and new literacy programs. Mrs. Campbell asked if there is a correlation between IEPs in the lower grades and the drop out rate. Mrs. Thies replied there is not a strong correlation.

SUPERINTENDENT'S ISSUES AND UPDATES

In accordance with policy, Dr. Mara informed the Committee about an overnight field trip by the DECA students to the International Career Competition in Atlanta, Georgia in April.

CHAIRPERSON'S INITIATIVES

Mr. Estrella said the next School Committee meeting is March 24, which is his birthday. He wished Mrs. Correia a happy birthday today.

The next Joint Finance Committee meeting is March 27th at the Bristol Town Hall. It is difficult to move forward until we know our budget.

Contract Negotiations

Mr. Silva reported the next negotiation session is scheduled for April 2; a team meeting will be held on March 20th.

Mrs. Campbell visited the high school art display at IMAGO gallery; it is very impressive.

ADJOURNMENT – 9:10 PM

There being no further business to discuss, Mr. Brule, seconded by Mr. Dugan, motioned to adjourn at 9:10 PM. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Paul Silva, Secretary

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